Eschatological Nuptials: An Exegetical, Historical, and Theological Analysis of the Parable of the Ten Virgins

Introduction

The Parable of the Ten Virgins, situated at the eschatological climax of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25:1–13, remains one of the most structurally complex and theologically profound narratives in the synoptic tradition[1]. The narrative describes ten virgins (*parthenoi*) waiting with lamps for the arrival of a delayed bridegroom. Five are designated as wise (*phronimoi*), having brought extra oil, while five are foolish (*morai*), possessing only the oil currently in their lamps[2]. Upon the sudden midnight cry announcing the groom's approach, the unprepared virgins are forced to leave to purchase more oil, resulting in their tragic exclusion from the wedding feast and the chilling pronouncement by the bridegroom: "I do not know you"[2].

A persistent interpretive conundrum surrounding this parable involves the conspicuous absence of a central figure inherent to any nuptial celebration: the bride[5]. The structural omission of the bride has historically led scholars, theologians, and lay readers alike to question whether the ten virgins represent mere attendants—the bridesmaids or "friends of the bride"—or if they collectively symbolize the bride herself[8]. This inquiry is frequently compounded by observations regarding ancient marriage laws. It has been theorized that because the Law of Moses did not strictly forbid polygamy, the parable might depict a literal scenario in which the bridegroom is arriving to marry all ten virgins simultaneously[3].

While earlier assumptions sometimes dismissed this by appealing strictly to universal Roman monogamy, a more nuanced examination of first-century Judean jurisprudence reveals that polygamy was indeed legally permissible and accepted as a local custom, even if less common among the general populace due to economic factors. However, despite this cultural permissibility, the textual criticism of the Matthean manuscript tradition, the theological construct of "corporate personality," and patristic exegesis point toward an allegorical reading. By synthesizing textual evidence with Pauline ecclesiology—specifically the betrothal of the Church to Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:2—it becomes evident that the ten virgins function allegorically as the aggregate, corporate Bride of Christ awaiting eschatological consummation[6].

The Eschatological and Literary Context of Matthew 25

To comprehend the allegorical weight of the ten virgins, the parable must first be located within its broader literary and canonical environment. The Gospel of Matthew places this narrative squarely within the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25), an extended teaching by Jesus concerning the destruction of the temple, His imminent return, the final judgment, and the consummation of the age[1].

The discourse is heavily characterized by themes of delay, vigilance, and accountability. Immediately preceding the parable, Jesus exhorts His disciples to keep watch because they do not know the day on which their Lord will come (Matthew 24:42)[2]. The Parable of the Ten Virgins functions as a concrete, narrative illustration of that specific command, establishing a theology of readiness that contrasts genuine, persevering faith with an empty religious profession[2].

In the immediate literary sequence, Matthew 25 presents three consecutive parables: the Ten Virgins (focusing on inner spiritual preparedness), the Talents (focusing on faithful stewardship and service), and the Sheep and the Goats (focusing on tangible compassion and final judgment)[6]. Together, these parables present a holistic portrait of genuine discipleship in the shadow of the Second Coming[15]. In this context, the virgins are not merely secondary characters in a domestic drama; they bear the full theological weight of the eschatological community waiting for the arrival of the Messiah. Their identity is fundamentally linked to the ultimate destiny of the Church[6].

First-Century Jewish Wedding Customs

The allegorical identification of the virgins as the collective bride requires a thorough understanding of the eschatological mapping of ancient Jewish wedding customs. Nuptial ceremonies in first-century Palestine consisted of distinct, highly formalized stages, which the early Church readily adopted as an allegorical framework for the history of redemption[14]. The narrative of Matthew 25 operates specifically within the final stage of this cultural matrix.

Stage of Marriage	Cultural Practice	Theological and Eschatological Parallel
Shiddukhin (Arrangement)	The initial match made by parents, establishing the terms of the union and the *mohar* (bride-price).	The eternal decree of God electing a people for the Son, and the redemptive price established by the cross.
Erusin (Betrothal)	A legally binding covenant. The couple was considered married, requiring a divorce to separate, but did not yet cohabitate.	The present Church age. Christ has established the New Covenant, though He is currently geographically separated from His Bride.
Nissuin (Consummation)	The groom arrives, typically at night, to claim the bride. A torchlit procession escorts the couple to the wedding banquet.	The Second Coming of Christ, the rapture or resurrection of the saints, and the eschatological Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins is set in the critical, transitional moment between *Erusin* and *Nissuin*. The virgins wait at or near the groom's destination—or along the path from the bride's home to the groom's home—to escort the returning party[5].

The utilization of lamps (*lampadas*) is culturally and logistically significant. Archaeological evidence, alongside historical documentation, indicates that these were not the small, indoor clay lamps familiar to modern readers, which held only enough oil for a few hours of steady flame. Rather, for an outdoor nighttime procession, these were likely torches consisting of rags wrapped around a pole and fed with pitch or olive oil from a hollow cup or receptacle[2]. If the groom delayed, the attendants had to carry extra flasks to continuously replenish the flame. Failure to do so resulted in a loss of light, and participating in a nighttime procession without a torch would lead to being mistaken for a party crasher or brigand[19].

The groom's unexpected delay (*chronizontos*) represents the delayed parousia, causing all ten virgins to succumb to sleep—a universally recognized metaphor for physical death[6]. When the midnight cry (*kraugē gegonen*) sounds, representing the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, the crisis of preparedness is abruptly realized[6]. The foolish virgins attempt to borrow oil, but the wise refuse. This refusal illustrates the intransferable nature of salvation; spiritual readiness cannot be borrowed, loaned, or delegated[2]. The shutting of the door (*thyra*) symbolizes the irrevocable finality of the eschatological judgment, permanently separating the prepared from the unprepared[18].

The Legal Status of Polygamy in Antiquity

A critical component of the inquiry into the identity of the ten virgins rests on the assumption that the parable could literally depict a polygamous marriage.

Polygamy in Second Temple Judaism

The Hebrew Bible undeniably contains instances of polygyny, beginning with Lamech in the reprobate line of Cain (Genesis 4:19) and continuing through patriarchs such as Abraham and Jacob, and monarchs like David and Solomon[22]. The Mosaic Law regulated the practice rather than abolishing it outright. For instance, Deuteronomy 21:15–17 dictates inheritance rights in the case of a man with two wives, ensuring the firstborn son receives a double portion regardless of the husband's favor toward the respective mothers[22]. Bigamy was recognized as a legal fact, and the levirate marriage law sometimes necessitated a married man taking his deceased brother's widow[22].

The landscape of Second Temple Judaism (516 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.) presents a nuanced picture regarding plural marriage. Scholars such as Joachim Jeremias and David Instone-Brewer have demonstrated that polygamy was accepted as normal, lawful, and useful by many Jews in the first century. The Mishnah actively acknowledges the practice in early Palestinian Judaism (e.g., m. Sanh. 2:4), confirming that bigamy or polygamy remained legally viable under Jewish religious law. The historian Josephus explicitly documented that it was the ancient custom for Jewish men to marry multiple wives, noting the polygamous marriages of Herod the Great as a recognized practice within Judean tradition, even if it contrasted with broader Greco-Roman norms[24].

While it was legally permissible, the practical frequency among commoners is debated. The high cost of the *mohar* (bride-price) and the strict financial obligations outlined in the *ketubbah* (marriage contract) meant that it was most conspicuously practiced by the extraordinarily wealthy, such as royalty, while monogamy remained more common out of practical necessity for the average citizen[18].

Furthermore, the Old Testament occasionally utilizes polygamous metaphors to describe the divine covenant itself. God presented Himself as having a polygamous relationship with the sisters of Israel (the northern tribes) and Judah (the southern tribes) in passages like Ezekiel 23 and Jeremiah 3. Therefore, a plural marital metaphor would not be conceptually alien or scandalous to Jesus' immediate Jewish audience.

Roman Law and the Mandate of Monogamy

Roman jurisprudence was strictly and uncompromisingly monogamous for its own citizens[27]. The Roman legal system recognized *matrimonium iustum* (legitimate marriage) only between one man and one woman. Bigamy and polygamy were explicitly forbidden and considered contrary to the moral fabric of the Republic and the subsequent Empire[10]. Under the reign of Augustus, the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* (17 B.C.E.) codified strict penalties for marital infidelity and reinforced the sanctity of the monogamous household[28]. A Roman citizen who attempted to marry a second wife while still married to the first would be guilty of bigamy, a crime that resulted in the immediate loss of honor (*infamia*) and social standing[27].

However, the Roman Empire was vast and pragmatic, frequently allowing significant leeway for local customs in its provinces. In first-century Palestine, Roman law did not universally force its monogamous mandate upon its Jewish subjects, allowing local Jewish laws to govern domestic and marital arrangements. Therefore, the legal status of a Jewish bridegroom taking multiple wives would not have been a violation of the local laws governing Judea at the time.

Legal System / Culture	**Stance on Polygamy in the 1st Century C.E.**	**Legal Mechanisms and Nuances**
Roman Law	Strictly Illegal for Citizens, but Leeway in Provinces	Enforced by *Lex Iulia* for Roman citizens, but allowed local customs and leeway in regions like Palestine.
Mosaic Law / Rabbinic Tradition	Lawful and Practiced	Permitted by Torah and accepted in the 1st century (e.g., m. Sanh. 2:4), though practically restricted by the financial costs of the *ketubbah*.
Qumran / Essene Sects	Strictly Prohibited	Condemned in the

		Damascus Document as a violation of the creational order (Genesis 1:27).
Early Christianity	Strictly Prohibited	Upheld monogamy. Mandated that church leaders be the "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

As the Christian Church expanded into the broader Greco-Roman world, it adopted and theologicalized this strict cultural monogamy. The Pauline pastoral epistles mandate that church leaders be the "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), a requirement that established an ethical standard of fidelity[24]. The early church fathers explicitly distanced themselves from any elements of Judaism that continued the polygynous tradition, and by the time of Constantine, Christian Rome had heavily restricted legal grounds for divorce and strictly outlawed bigamy[30].

While it is historically and legally accurate that a Jewish wedding *could* have involved polygamy in the first century, a literal interpretation suggesting that the ten virgins are all individual brides fundamentally ignores the broader allegorical intent and literary structure of the narrative. The virgins are properly understood in their literal narrative sense as the bridal party—unmarried companions tasked with escorting the groom to the wedding banquet, who are then utilized by Jesus as a corporate metaphor[6].

Textual Criticism: The Mystery of the Missing Bride

If the literal setting features the virgins as attendants, the narrative poses an immediate and glaring literary problem: the bride is missing from the text. This conspicuous absence generated profound discomfort among early Christian copyists, leading to one of the most significant and fascinating textual variants in the transmission of the Gospel of Matthew.

The Alexandrian vs. Western Textual Traditions

In Matthew 25:1, the earliest and most reliable Greek manuscripts of the Alexandrian text-type—including Codex Sinaiticus (4 ,א th century), Codex Vaticanus (B, 4th century), and Codex Alexandrinus (A, 5th century)—read: *exēlthon eis hypantēsin tou nymphou* ("they went out to meet the bridegroom")[1]. This shorter reading is also heavily attested in the later Byzantine majority text, which formed the basis for the *Textus Receptus*[6].

However, the Western textual tradition introduces a significant narrative harmonization. Codex Bezae (D, 5th century), Codex Koridethi (Θ, 9th century), alongside several Old Latin witnesses, the Latin Vulgate, the Syriac Peshitta, and certain Coptic manuscripts, add three crucial words to the text: *exēlthon eis hypantēsin tou nymphou kai tēs nymphēs* ("they went out to meet the bridegroom **and the bride**")[1].

Text-Type	Key Manuscript Witnesses	Reading in Matthew 25:1	English Translation
Alexandrian	Sinaiticus (א), Vaticanus (B), Alexandrinus (A)	ἐξῆλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου	"went out to meet the bridegroom"
Western	Codex Bezae (D), Old Latin, Vulgate, Peshitta, Coptic	ἐξῆλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου **καὶ τῆς νύμφης**	"went out to meet the bridegroom **and the bride**"
Byzantine	Majority Text	ἐξῆλθον εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου	"went out to meet the bridegroom"

The Principle of Lectio Difficilior

In the discipline of textual criticism, the principle of *lectio difficilior probatior* ("the more difficult reading is the more probable") is applied to determine the original text. Scribes rarely omit clarifying information; they are much more prone to add it to resolve perceived theological tensions or narrative gaps[6].

The shorter Alexandrian reading is undeniably the more difficult one. A wedding procession naturally requires a bride. Western scribes, familiar with local wedding customs in which the groom retrieves his bride from her father's house to form a joint procession back to his own estate, felt the narrative gap acutely. Assuming that Matthew must have intended a full bridal party, they inserted "and the bride" to construct a complete, logical picture of the groom returning with his new wife, escorted by the bridesmaids[1].

Bruce M. Metzger, in his authoritative *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, confirms that the addition is a secondary expansion. The compilers of the critical text regard it as a later addition resulting from scribal attempts to "correct" the parable's imagery based on cultural expectations[32]. The shorter reading found in the Alexandrian and Byzantine traditions is virtually certain to be original[6].

The Literary Function of the Omission

The original omission of the bride by the author of Matthew is not a historical oversight but a deliberate, sophisticated literary and theological device. By removing the singular figure of the bride from the narrative stage, the parable forces the audience's attention entirely onto the ten virgins[1]. They occupy the functional space of the bride. The spotlight is directed toward their preparedness, their oil, and their ultimate acceptance or rejection by the bridegroom.

The narrative vacuum created by the absent bride allows the virgins to step into her

eschatological shoes, inviting the reader to realize that the attendants represent the Bride of Christ in a collective, spiritual sense[6]. Jesus' deliberate use of ten virgins instead of a singular bride underscores His intended emphasis on individual readiness aggregating into corporate expectation[6].

The Hermeneutics of Corporate Personality and Ecclesiology

If the literal setting is a wedding where the virgins are literally attendants, how do the ten bridesmaids equate to the Bride? The answer lies in the ancient Near Eastern sociological and theological construct known as "corporate personality," a paradigm essential for bridging individual identity and collective ecclesiology.

H. Wheeler Robinson and the "One and the Many"

The concept of "corporate personality," brought to prominence by Old Testament scholar H. Wheeler Robinson, elucidates the Hebrew conceptualization of identity, wherein the individual is fluidly identified with the group—whether the family, the clan, the tribe, or the nation—and vice versa[36]. In this framework, the action of an individual is inextricably linked to the action of the larger group. A single patriarch like Jacob can embody the entire nation of Israel, and conversely, the entire nation is frequently addressed as a singular entity ("Israel, my son")[36].

In the New Testament, this concept is christologically translated into the doctrine of the Church as the "Body of Christ" and the "Bride of Christ." The Church is a singular, collective entity comprised of a multiplicity of individual members[5]. As H. Wheeler Robinson notes, metaphors such as the Bride of Christ imply the profound unity of the redeemed collective, formed and characterized by the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit[37].

Pauline Nuptial Ecclesiology and 2 Corinthians 11:2

The Apostle Paul explicitly applies the concept of corporate personality to the bridal metaphor in his second epistle to the Corinthians. He writes, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin (*parthenon hagnēn*) to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2)[1].

Here, Paul addresses the entire congregation at Corinth—composed of hundreds of individual men and women—as a singular "chaste virgin." The collective unity of the local church is conceptually merged into the singular Bride[5]. This eschatological betrothal envisions the community waiting to be presented to the Bridegroom at His return. The individuals are betrothed to Christ, not to form a polygamous harem in the afterlife, but to collectively constitute the singular, spotless Bride[3].

Merging the Virgins and the Bride in Matthew 25

When viewed through the lens of corporate personality and Pauline ecclesiology, the interpretive dissonance of Matthew 25 resolves itself completely. The ten virgins are a fractal representation of the universal Church[5].

The number ten symbolizes a complete group, akin to the Jewish *minyan*, the quorum required for a synagogue assembly. The designation of "virgins" signifies individuals who profess faith and wait for Christ. Like Paul's "chaste virgin" in 2 Corinthians, their virginity represents spiritual purity and separation from the idolatrous world[5]. The Bride herself is the aggregate of the *wise* virgins.

As Lange acutely observes, "The Church, in her aggregate and ideal unity, is the bride; the members of the Church, as individually called, are guests; in their separation from the world, and expectation of the Lord's coming, they are his virgins"[6]. The bride is structurally missing in the parable precisely because the virgins themselves constitute her[5]. Upon entering the wedding feast, the multiplicity of the five wise virgins coalesces into the singular, corporate Bride of the Lamb.

Intertextual Echoes: Psalm 45 and Revelation 14

The allegorical identification of individual virgin attendants as the collective Bride is not a novel invention of Matthew's Gospel; it is a well-established motif rooted in Hebrew poetry and later consummated in apocalyptic literature.

The Royal Wedding of Psalm 45

Psalm 45, a *Maskil* of the sons of Korah, is a royal wedding song celebrating the marriage of an Israelite king, which subsequently assumed profound messianic significance[44]. The writer extols the majesty of the king, who rides out in splendor and justice, a figure identified in the Epistle to the Hebrews as Christ Himself (Hebrews 1:8–9)[44].

In describing the bridal procession, the psalmist writes: "In her beautiful robes, she is led to the king, accompanied by her bridesmaids [lit. 'virgin companions', *btulot*]" (Psalm 45:14)[44]. The imagery features both a singular royal bride (the Queen in gold of Ophir) and a retinue of virgins following her into the king's palace[7]. In Christian exegesis, this psalm operates simultaneously on multiple typological levels: it prefigures the Church as the Queen (the Bride of Christ) and the individual believers—or the saints of various dispensations—as the virgin companions who follow her into the eschatological joy[44].

The structural parallel to Matthew 25 is exact: virgin companions waiting to enter the palace of the king. By the time Jesus delivers the Olivet Discourse, the imagery of virgin attendants participating in the royal marriage was already a well-established metaphor for eschatological salvation.

Revelation 14:4 and Eschatological Purity

The symbol of the virgin is further developed and finalized in the Johannine Apocalypse. In Revelation 14:4, the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion are described thus: "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they are virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes"[50].

While some esoteric and hyper-literal sects have interpreted this as a strict requirement for physical celibacy[51], mainstream biblical scholarship universally recognizes this as a profound

spiritual metaphor[50]. Spiritual fornication in the Old Testament equates to idolatry—worshipping false gods or, in the context of Revelation, following the Beast or the Whore of Babylon. To be a "virgin" in Revelation 14 is to maintain covenantal fidelity to the Lamb, remaining spiritually unblemished in a corrupt world[50].

These 144,000 virgins collectively comprise the redeemed community—the very same community that is later explicitly identified as the "Bride, the wife of the Lamb" in Revelation 19:7 and 21:9[3]. Thus, the New Testament establishes a clear, consistent literary equivalency: the individual followers of the Lamb are eschatological virgins, and their unified, glorified assembly is the Bride.

Patristic Exegesis and Historical Interpretation

The early Church Fathers, unbound by the hyper-literalism that characterizes some modern interpretations, universally recognized the symbolic overlay between the virgins of Matthew 25 and the Bride of Christ. Their exegesis focused profoundly on the spiritual conditions of the virgins—specifically the symbolism of the oil and the nature of their preparedness.

John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo

For John Chrysostom (c. 347–407 C.E.), the Parable of the Ten Virgins was fundamentally a warning against relying on outward purity at the expense of inward virtue. In his *Homily 78 on Matthew*, Chrysostom emphasizes that all ten women physically possessed the "gift of virginity," representing outward holiness, physical chastity, or orthodox faith[2]. However, the five foolish virgins are condemned because they lacked the "oil" of humanity, almsgiving, and active, sacrificial love[2]. Chrysostom argues that purity without charity is a dark lamp; the lack was not of lamps, but of virtue[15].

Augustine of Hippo interpreted the oil through a slightly different, though complimentary, pneumatological lens. He viewed the oil explicitly as "love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit"[15]. For Augustine, the wise virgins represented true believers whose faith was animated by the inner presence and regenerating power of the Spirit, whereas the foolish virgins represented nominal Christians—those with the outward trappings of the Church (the lamps) but possessing no inner spiritual life[15].

Both Chrysostom and Augustine understood the virgins collectively as representing the professing Church awaiting the Bridegroom. The division between the wise and foolish demonstrates that the visible Church contains both the true Bride (the wise) and the self-deceived (the foolish)[5].

Patristic Theologian	Allegorical Identity of the Virgins	Symbolism of the Oil	Reason for the Exclusion of the Foolish Virgins
John Chrysostom	Professing Christians in the visible Church	Almsgiving, charity, and active virtue	Possessing orthodox purity but failing in active love

			and charity for the poor
Augustine of Hippo	Members of the visible Church	The Holy Spirit; inward, regenerating love	Outward religiosity without the inward transformation of the Holy Spirit
Ephrem the Syrian	Souls navigating mortality toward judgment	Ascetic labor, spiritual watchfulness (*nepsis*)	Succumbing to spiritual slumber and the distractions of the world

Ephrem the Syrian and the Ascetic Tradition

Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373 C.E.), a foundational hymnographer and theologian often called the "Harp of the Holy Spirit," integrated the parable into the deep ascetic and poetic theology of the Syriac East[60]. Ephrem's exegesis focuses heavily on the concept of *nepsis* (spiritual watchfulness and sobriety)[63]. He connects the unexpected, delayed arrival of the bridegroom to the unknown hour of human death, which he viewed as a profound, pedagogical mercy: "God knows us; he knows what terrible anxiety it would be for us to know beforehand the exact hour... [He hides it] so that we will be vigilant"[64].

In Ephrem's paradigm, the "sleep" of the virgins represents the unavoidable reality of physical death, during which the soul rests[21]. The midnight cry is the general resurrection at the end of the age. At that moment, only those who cultivated a life of ascetic labor, living faith, and spiritual readiness during their mortality will possess the required "oil" to enter the heavenly bridal chamber[21]. For Ephrem, the virgins are the souls of humanity moving toward ultimate union with the divine Bridegroom.

Gnostic Subversions: The Valentinian Bridal Chamber

While orthodox Christianity interpreted the parable ecclesially and morally, Gnostic groups of the second and third centuries hijacked the bridal imagery for highly esoteric, sacramental purposes. Texts discovered at Nag Hammadi, such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*, reveal a highly developed Gnostic theology of the "bridal chamber" (*nymphōn*)[65].

In Saying 75 of the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus states, "There are many standing at the door, but it is the solitaries who will enter the bridal chamber"[65]. Scholars note that this is a direct Gnostic subversion of the Parable of the Ten Virgins[65]. The "many at the door" are equated with the foolish virgins (or, in Gnostic thought, orthodox, literalist Christians), while the "solitaries" (the enlightened, pneumatic Gnostics) alone possess the secret knowledge to enter the divine mystery.

The *Gospel of Philip* takes this further, describing an actual ritual sacrament known as the Bridal Chamber. This ritual was intended to reunite the divided male and female elements of the soul,

effectively reversing the primordial fall of Adam and Eve and restoring divine unity[65]. In this Valentinian system, the physical body and earthly marriage are denigrated; the true union occurs spiritually in the esoteric bridal suite, accessible only to the fully initiated[49]. While entirely heterodox, this Gnostic obsession with the bridal chamber underscores how pervasive, powerful, and malleable the nuptial metaphors of Matthew 25 were in the theological consciousness of late antiquity.

Conclusion

The Parable of the Ten Virgins serves as a profound eschatological warning wrapped in the intimate imagery of ancient Near Eastern matrimony. A comprehensive analysis of textual variants reveals that the absence of the bride in the original Greek manuscript of Matthew 25 is a deliberate theological mechanism designed to shift focus, not a historical oversight corrected by later Western scribes.

Addressing the core query: it is entirely conceivable—and indeed theologically imperative—that the ten virgins represent the Bride of Christ rather than just the "friends of the bride." While scholars accurately note that polygamy was legally permissible in first-century Judea under provincial Roman leeway, and conceptually present in Old Testament metaphors of God's covenant with Israel and Judah, the literary and textual structure of Matthew 25 points toward an allegorical interpretation. The biblical concept of corporate personality effortlessly bridges the gap between the plural virgins and the singular bride. The individuals who comprise the Church are betrothed to Christ as "chaste virgins" (2 Corinthians 11:2), charged with keeping their lamps burning with the oil of the Spirit, living faith, and vigilant love.

Through intertextual alignment with Psalm 45 and Revelation 14, and supported by the robust ecclesiological exegesis of Church Fathers like Chrysostom, Augustine, and Ephrem the Syrian, the theological reality is crystallized. The ten virgins are the professing Church. The wise among them—those whose outward confession is sustained by inner grace—will collectively constitute the Bride of Christ upon His return. The parable, therefore, is not a manual on ancient marital logistics, but a clarion call to spiritual preparedness for the midnight hour when the Bridegroom finally arrives to claim His Church.

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